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AUTHOR Irwin, James R.
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ABSTRACT

Approaches to improve student achievement through improved self-actualization are attempted in the following programs: Rev. Jesse Jackson's Operation PUSH; the U.S. Department of Labor's program known as the Youth Incentive Entitlement Pilot Project Program; Denver, Colorado's New Pride Experiment; the Michigan Expeditions Program; and the John Dancy Street Academy, established in Detroit by the local Urban League. The Detroit Urban League also sponsored a book "They Made It, So Can You" by Dr. Francis Kornegay, that is supplied free to the schools. Aimed at middle school students, the book contains brief biographical sketches of approximately 80 outstanding Michigan blacks who have achieved success. Another viewpoint encourages educators to give students a stake in the schools so that the percentage of those who make trouble remains low. A third approach is that, in many cases, the doubter, the delinquent, and the dropout do not suffer from a lack of self-concept, but rather lack confidence in the school's reality to their own life situation. (Author/MLF)

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Doubters, Delinquents and Dropouts - Can They Be Helped Through Improved Self-Concepts?

--James R. Irwin, Ed. D.
Principal
Chadsey High School
Detroit, Michigan

(Speech Delivered at the Annual Convention of the National Association of Secondary School Principals, Anaheim, California, Saturday, February 11, 1978)

One's-Self I Sing

One's-Self I sing, a simple separate person
Yet utter the word Democratic, the word Enmasse
Of physiology from top to toe I sing.
Not physiogonomy alone nor brain alone is worthy for the Muse,
I say the Form complete is worthier far,
The Female equally with the Male I sing.

Of life immense in passion, pulse, and power,
Cheerful, for freest action form'd under the laws divine
The Modern Man I sing.

Thus did good, gray Walt Whitman confirm his belief in the concept of self-realization as he penned these words in the introduction to his famous work, Leaves of Grass, published first in 1867.

The roots for improved self-concepts for all students in American schools, particularly those on the secondary level, may be traced back to the mysticism of the early Puritan settlers and Jonathan Edwards through Emerson, Thoreau and Whitman to today's integrating principles as promulgated by the humanistic psychologist, Abraham Maslow, and others so that today education is vitally concerned with the necessity of assisting pupils to achieve some degree of satisfactory self-realization.

As Maslow has indicated in his work, The Farther Reaches of Human Nature:

> ...The function of education, the goal of education - the human goal, the goal so far as human beings are concerned - is ultimately the "self-actualization of a person, the becoming fully human, the development of the fullest height that the human species can stand up to or that particular individual can come to. In a less technical way, it is helping the person to become the best that he is able to become.

Professional education in the United States is currently marked by a large number of projects, innovations and programs aimed at answering the basic question proposed at this session, namely, can the goal of education, the human goal of improved self-concept, self-actualization, self-realization be more fully realized in our school setting so that the doubter may be encouraged to not become delinquent and dropout?

In a word, the professional educational forces of our country are deeply concerned both philosophically and pragmatically with "man" making "man" into "man" for the same of "man", but also in deference to the distaff side and being cognizant of semantics with the emerging roles of women, we may substitute the term "people making" for the term "man".

Spurred on by the ESEA Act of 1965 and by the widely accepted psychological assumptions that the problems of the schools, particularly those of dropouts, throwouts, delinquents, are the results of poor self-concept, projects, programs, and research dealing with self-perception assessment have burgeoned into mainstream events. The sharp increase in the number of studies on self-concept is certainly an indication of the present emphasis upon noncognitive outcomes of education and serves to show that many forces have become enjoined to attempt to provide improved value systems to these alienated adolescents so that they may reain or return to school and achieve some measure of success.

Any examination of the range of self-concept investigations currently being conducted in America shows that the present mood is committed to the pre-supposition that social, economic, and human problems, at large, have roots in the nature of the self-concept of the individual and that by changing what might be called "poor self-concept", it follows that social, economic, and human problems will be alleviated.

In other words, if the schools can convince the doubter that as a person he/she is important, that they definitely have a positive place within the school situation, that their own self-image is important, than they may not become either delinquent in the educational framework or dropout to seek other satisfactory success roles in society.

Michael Scriven has provided a categorization of people who seeking solutions to the values implicit in the improvement of self-realization as follows:

1. The affectivists who believe that self-actualization should emphasize feeling, and attitude, using role-playing techniques and the presentation of worthy adult models as a link to appropriate ultimate student behaviors.

2. The developmentalists who believe in the developmental stages of the child-- different members of a group are on different levels of moral reasoning and that no general treatment can can have any consequence.

3. The cognitivists who believe that a curriculum which provides moral reasoning and analysis skills should be emphasized over the affective aspects of value's or moral education.

Succinctly stated, then the affectivists, the developmentalists and the cognitivists are in agreement on one basic premise, specifically, that improved self-concepts in any given school situation can assist an alienated adolescent to achieve success in the educational framework.

Let us, then examine a few pragmatic approaches to the problem that are currently extent in the country to prove the point that improved self-concepts will improve school success through improved achievement.

First, since the largest alientation toward schools lies in the ethnic area, particularly among black youth who have the dubious distinction of having the highest rate of unemployment among Americans, it is heartening to note the work of Rev. Jesse Jackson who has embarked on a nationwide crusade to improve school achievement through improved self-actualization.

Specifically, through his famed Operation PUSH he has pointed out that knowledge is the key to power and power is the key to progress. Schools can no longer be set aside as quarantined islands in society, they can no longer be an elitiest island. Teachers have to overcome their too low expectations for students, particularly blacks, for learning takes place in an atmosphere of high expectations on the part of teachers.

If schools are the social-cultural matrix of the nation they cannot be the dumping grounds for all of society's ills. It costs only $20,000 to send a youth through four years in an Illinois college or university, for example, he indicates, while it cost Illinois some $52,000 to keep that same youth in jail for the same length of time.

If you have had the privilege of hearing Rev. Jackson in person as I did at Wayne State University in Detroit on October 10, 1976, you may well find yourself standing at the conclusion of his address as part of a shouting, clapping, stamping group saying "Amen" to an inspiration that has stressed three main points, all dealing with self-actualization,

to wit: 1. I am somebody! If you love yourself adequatedly, you can love others properly. If you are sufficient on the inside, you will overflow with love for others. 2. Down with dope, up with hope! 3. Nobody will save us from us for us, but us. While the latter message is primarly intended for the black members of his audience, it has obvious implications for self-improvement for peoples of all colors.

Another attempt to either keep possible dropouts in school or to encourage those who have left to return is the program sponsored by the United Sates Department of Labor known as the Youth Incentive Entitlement Pilot Project Program which guarantees a job paying the 1978 minimum wage of $2.65 an hour to 16 to 19 year olds who will work while going to school. Since it is a known fact that lack of employment is closely associated with personal self-esteem, it is presumed that if these youth, most of whom are now on the streets, can be motivated to return to school with actual employment or to remain in school they will begin to achieve both educationally and vocationally. Detroit, fortunately, is one of several large cities being recipients of this governmental bonanza, but it again undergirds the basic assumption of this session, namely, improved self-concept through a combination of factors such as employment while attending school can result in improvement.

A third example of what can be done to improve delinquents attitudes toward education through a program involving better self-concepts is that currently being conducted in Denver, Colorado, involving intenseive educational help in turning hard-core delinquents away from crime. Called Denver's New Pride Experiment, the program has been conducted

for three and one-half years by judges, government agencies, civic groups and volunteers and assumes learning disabilities and delinquency are erlated. It attempts to correct these learning deficiencies as a cure for crime. It has been so successful that the law enforcement Assistance Administration has recommedded it for every other city in the country.

New Pride accepts youths who are 14 to 17 years old who have multiple convictions for burglary, robbery, assault or auto theft. Most also come from broken homes supported by welfare, have quit school, are unemployed and perhaps have problems with drugs or alcohol.

Every four months, New Pride accepts 20 mostly male blacks and/or Spanish-speaking minority group members referred by Denver probation officers. The youths get four months of intensive counseling and training and nine months of daily to weekly contact with counselors.

The supervision continues long after the youth returns to schools gets a job or perhaps does both on a part-time basis.

A somewhat similar program also sponsored by the Law Enforcement Assistance Agency through the office of Criminal Justice Programs has been operating in Michigan since July, 1975. Know as the Michigan Expeditions Program it is a short term 12-20 days high impact adventure education program consisting of a series of programed physical, emotional and social problem solving tasks conducted in a high-impact environment. Activities include backpacking, rock climbing, route finding, stream and river crossing and conoeing conducted in a lighthouse facility in a Michigan State Park. Involved in the year around program which services youths who are referred by local juvenile courts or social agencies. It includes both boys and girls in its activities. It has shown that

students who have the highest probability of success are at least 15 years or older at court commitment, aggressive as opposed to not aggressive, youth who return to homes in which both parents are present and youth whose delinquency is a response to home conflict and not characterized by stubborness or running away.

One truth that has developed from this program is that it is of little value to attempt to point out to an adjudicated delinquent that he is far more capable than he feels himself to be. What is necessary is to devise a set of circumstances whereby the youth can clearly demonstrate this competence to himself or herself. Only then will opportunities for concrete, impressive accomplishment promote personal growth.

Still another example of a positive program involving improved self-concepts resulting in educational success is the establishment in Detroit of the John Dancy Street Academy by the local Urban League. Founded shortly after the riots of 1967, the Academy appealed to black youth to return to a school run by the Urban League, not the school system, and to qualify for passing the General Educational Development Test and obtain the G.E.D. certificate in a 12-week program involving READ classes, conducted on an informal basis utilizing tutorial services when necessary, and including job counseling. Over 500 students, largely dropouts and delinquents, had enrolled and more than 85 per cent have successfully completed the program by passing and receiving a diploma through the G.E.D. program.

Still another attempt by the Detroit Urban League to improve school achievement through improved self-concept is the publication of a book, <u>They Made It, So Can You</u> authored by Dr. Francis Kornegay, local Executive Director, aimed at middle school students. Among other approaches,

Dr. Kornegay indicates through brief biographical pictures and sketches of approximately 80 outstanding Michigan blacks who have achieved success, to the adolescent reader to whom the book has been supplied free by the League to Detroit schools that they may do likewise. In a foreward to the book, Dr. John W. Porter, Michigan Superintendent of Public Instruction, points out that each year in Michigan approximately six to seven percent of the total high school population or about 41,300 students leave secondary school. In Detroit alone, the dropout rate is nearly 9,000 students per year of whom 80 per cent are black. Himself a black, Dr. Porter says in encouragement of self-actualization: "Many of these young men and women have the ability and the talent to continue. Many, if given the opportunity again, can make it. Many more may want to succeed. Dropping out is not a closed door. Alternative educational programs exist and those who embrace them can succeed in school."

These, then, are but a handful of many hundreds of examples that show that improved self-concepts do help the doubter, the delinquent and the dropout.

One other viewpoint along these lines may be of further interest. William Glasser, a Los Angeles-based psychiatrist who founded the Institute for Reality Therapy in 1967 and serves as its president, and who has worked in the public schools of Sacramento, Palo Alto, and Los Angeles since 1961, in discussing disorders in our schools, causes and remedies in the January, 1978, issue of Phi Delta Kappan encourages educators to give students a stake in the schools so that that the percentage of those who make trouble remains low enough that we can live with the problems of disruptions. Students must be offered more acceptance, they must feel accepted and cared for. Blaming school problems on bad homes or bad communities is a sad rationalization that too many educators embrace, claims Dr. Glasser, for

Wherever they are, people want to do well; they want to enjoy themselves. People are perfectly able to do well in any one situation, so if the school is an oasis where one is accepted, where he enjoys himself, and where he feels he has some value, he will tend to follow the rules. Thus, the doubter, one presumes, will not become delinquent and will not dropout.

Who knows, if each student could be supplied with the bracelet recently advertised for $8.50 in the New Yorker proclaiming "Damn, I'm Good" and manufactured to boost confidence, many school problems could be solved. Even the Fonz of the second highest viewed TV program in America today, namely, "Happy Days", returned to school, dropped out again, but finally finished up in high school.

In concluding, however, one must in all justice point out that in many cases the doubter, the delinquent and the dropout do not suffer from a lack of self-concept, but rather feel so superior to the school situation, feel that the school is failing to reach them that they drop out and seek other means of self-satisfaction whether it be delinquency or the more positive field of employment. Many like the Fonz feel the school to be a waste of time, not because they lack self-confidence but because they lack confidence in the school's reality to their own life situation. Many dropouts have such superegos that they have left school feeling superior to that which was transpiring in the school's classrooms.

Thus, too often educators become "do gooders" who feel that since they are awash with the self-righteous Puritan strain holding away as individual soothsayers they must develop panaceas to modify the behavior of the doubter, the delinquent and the dropout toward the good and thus save another soul. As Margaret Mead, the distinguished American

anthropologist, recently stated in a TV interview: "In America, we always legislate for goodness."

As Ernie Bushmiller, the artist who draws the comicstrip, Nancy, put it in his syndicated work on December 8, 1977, his two favorite tough guy characters, Sluggo and Spike meet on a city street. Sluggo says, "Hey, Spike, I haven't seen you at school lately," Spike replies: "I'm a drop in." Sluggo responds, "I think you mean drop out." Spike replies, "No, I mean drop in. I drop in to school every now and then."

Can doubter, delinquents and dropouts be improved through improved self-concepts? The answer is an overwhelming yes, with the reservations noted.

We began with Walt Whitman. Let us conclude seeing how he seems to have captured the essence of human self-realization in his Song of Myself written about 1855:

> I celebrate myself, and sing myself
> And what I assume you shall assume
> For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you.
>
> I loafe and invite my soul,
> I lean and loafe at my ease observing a spear of summer grass.